**Transcript**

Respect Victoria Research Series: Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women with Disability

**Online Forum**

23 March 2022

JODY BARNEY: Hello, everybody. I would like to welcome you all here today. It's wonderful to see so many joining us and working with us to see what we're going to deliver today. As part of my cultural responsibilities, I would like to introduce Aunty Georgina Nicholson, a Wurundjeri Elder, to provide us with a Welcome to Country today. Over to you, Aunty.

GEORGINA NICHOLSON: Thank you, Jody. Lovely introduction. Hello, everyone. My name is Georgina Nicholson and I'm a proud Wurundjeri, Woi Wurrung woman. Wurundjeri being part of the Kulin Nation. The Kulin Nation consists of five clans, and they are Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Wathaurung, Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung. Wurundjeri being all of Melbourne's CBD and surrounding country, extending north to the Great Dividing Range, east to Mount Baw Baw, south to Mordialloc Creek and west to the mouth of Werribee River. So I would like to acknowledge and pay my respect to our ancestors who walked and lived on this land as free spirits for millennia. I would also like to acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who may be online with us today and I pay my respects to you all and to your Elders. So I would like to say thank you to your organisation for incorporating a very important, ancient custom into your event today, a Welcome to Country.

So I would like to acknowledge in a nutshell the Melbourne University research team. I have been told they're amazing and I think they are amazing, so I am acknowledging all of you today. For those of you tuning in from Wurundjeri Country, I would like to say to you Wominjeka Wurundjeri balluk yearmenn koondee bik. So I would just like to the tell you what I have said in our Woi Wurrung language, and that is welcome to the land of the Wurundjeri people. For those of you tuning in from other lands of Aboriginal people, where they own the lands, they're traditional owners, I would like to acknowledge all of you and pay respects to all of the traditional owners where you're joining from today.

Now, my mother, Martha Margaret Nicholson, nee Terrick, she was delivered by her grandmother, Granny Jemima, and that was on Coranderrk Aboriginal mission near the present‑day town of Healesville. So Granny Jemima was already teaching our mother the importance of culture, of connection to land and of caring for one another.

Years later, our mother met a deadly Irishman called Patrick and they met on a blind date in Melbourne in the early 1930s. In 1937, mummy and daddy were married and they had 16 children ‑ 8 girls, 8 boys, all single babies, no twins, no cheating, LOL! Out of the 16, I'm the youngest and the oldest is my sister Pat Ockwell. There might be people on this call today that know Aunty Pat Ockwell. She has been involved with her community and with Aboriginal affairs with so many, so many things for many, many years. My sister Pat turned 84 last year and for an Aboriginal woman to reach that age is a milestone, for they say that we don't live as long as other cultures. There's about a 12 to 15 year gap there, and that's a huge gap for our people and we do have a lot of "sorry" business in our Aboriginal families and communities. So one tradition is our Woiwurrung language. It is part of our rich, deep heritage and I like to say that our language has been sleeping and now we're waking it up. So some of the ways we do keep our culture alive is through performances, stories and songs, and I just think that it's important to learn the language. It is very hard at my age but it feels more authentic to know the language and it is more authentic, I think, to learn the language again and I'm really looking forward to learning my language. I believe that we are the sovereign owners of Australia, the Aboriginal people, and there have been no treaties with us up‑to‑date, although Victoria is starting off their treaty process soon. So hopefully our future generations will benefit from that because there's a lot of them. There has been ‑ yes, we have never ceded our sovereignty, which is quite sad, and I just ‑ I think I might finish it there because I think I'm going over time but thank you, everyone, for hearing me today. Thank you for having this on your event today, the welcome. Please take care and stay safe and have a great webinar today. Thank you.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you so much, Aunty Georgina, for your Welcome to Country. You always do a beautiful Welcome to Country. We know that all over Australia, First Nations people had the responsibility to caretake the land, the rivers, the waters and the seas, our animals are very important, our people and our children are very important. So thank you very much for your Welcome to Country.

GEORGINA NICHOLSON: Thank you.

JODY BARNEY: I'm very honoured today to have been invited to be your facilitator for this event. Before I begin, my responsibility here is also to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on where I am, which is the Yorta‑Yorta peoples. I live on this country and have done for the last 20 years but my people are from Queensland. I'm very excited today to acknowledge all other First Nations people who are with us and pay respects to your Elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge all other First Nations peoples from across the ditch and the collaborations and the relationships that we have with all First Nations peoples are valuable. So thank you and I acknowledge you all and your traditional custodians, your children and your kin.

So I'm here today to facilitate and the reason for that ‑ I'm very fortunate because I have worked in this space for the last 35 years. I'm also a survivor of family violence and domestic abuse. But I would also like to acknowledge that today, the wonderful work that all these people that have been involved in this particular project are paid respect. With over 300 people registered today, I was a little bit nervous! But we also needed to find out what made this project so beneficial, what the findings have been, what the drivers are, and also making sure that we can work collaboratively with the community to enhance the outcomes for women and for children and for men, of course, who experience family violence.

We have had four different research forums that demonstrated what had been happening. We had Respect Victoria, which we're very grateful to for the wonderful work that they do within the team and make sure that this important work continues, and we're also hearing today what people have put together. I would like to pay respect to Respect Victoria, the authority focussing on the primary prevention, stopping violence before it starts and changing the culture for people who potentially need to stop and think about what processes are taken so that we can stop it before it begins. And with that, I would like to introduce to you all Emily Maguire, CEO of Respect Victoria and Cecilia Hemana, Director Research and Evaluation. Emily will provide more information on her role at Respect Victoria and Cecilia will be closing our event today. So I have a lot of notes and I've got a lot in front of me but we need to make sure that we can now ask Emily to come and talk about Respect Victoria and the role and the wonderful work that you're doing day to day. Thank you, Emily.

EMILY MAGUIRE: Thank you, Jody. A really warm welcome to everyone here with us on this webinar today to hear from an amazing bunch of researchers and activists and specialists in preventing violence against women with a disability. I'd like to thank also Aunty Georgina for her really lovely and personal Welcome to Country. I know she's not on the call with us but one of the things that I love about Aunty Georgina's Welcome to Country is that you always get a bit of her personal history and her family history as part of her welcome and her acknowledgment and I really love the analogy she had about the language sleeping and being woken up. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are all meeting today. I'm on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Woiwurrung language group. I'd like to pay respects to Elders past, present and those amazing emerging leaders who are leading communities across Victoria and Australia, and I'd like to recognise the continued connection to land and to country and to culture, despite the historical and current experiences and impacts of colonisation. And I would also like to recognise the leadership that's shown in this particular space by Aboriginal women in particular who are incredibly staunch and courageous in always working to draw our eyes and our ears to the experiences and the impacts of family violence and violence against women.

Can I thank Dan Stubbs, the Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner, and Nadia Mattiazzo, who is the CEO of Women with Disabilities Victoria. They are joining us here today. Thank you so much. We are so incredibly appreciative of both of your contributions and your commitment ongoing to promoting the rights and entitlements of women and people with disability. So I want to thank you, Jody, for being our facilitator today. Your more than 35 years of experience in working with First Nations women with a disability is so incredibly valuable and we're really looking forward to seeing all of the extra information and inputs you can give us as the facilitator in this process.

So today is the fourth in Respect Victoria's research seminar series, building the evidence to stop violence before it starts. These research forums are where we can share with practitioners and policy makers our research into what drives family violence and all forms of violence against women, as well as what works to prevent these forms of violence from happening in the first place. Today we are incredibly privileged to hear from Associate Professors Georgia Sutherland and Cathy Vaughan and community researcher Jen Hargrave from the University of Melbourne. Georgina, Cathy and Jen will discuss their new research which was commissioned by Respect Victoria which explores the nature of violence against women with a disability in Australia and will look at what works to prevent this form of violence from happening in the first place. We'll then have an interactive Q&A session and you can see some information in the chat guiding you how to ask questions and how to offer reflections as we go along, and we'll hear from a panel of leaders who will working on the prevention of violence against women with a disability in Victoria.

For those of you who may not be familiar with our organisation, Respect Victoria is an Independent Statutory Authority that is focused on the prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women. Our remit is enshrined in Victorian legislation, one of the only prevention organisations in the country I think to have that honour upon us, I think, and our remit is to drive effective and evidence‑informed and most importantly impactful prevention activity. We do that through building the evidence base about what works through community awareness campaigns, through enabling a stronger and more effective policy approach, and through supporting connections between and across agencies and sectors to offer coordination and support for a really strong and consistent statewide approach to prevention. We are a relatively young organisation. We're still in our toddlerhood and I'm a relatively new CEO to Respect Victoria but I really hope that we will become an important part of the prevention landscape in this space and I'm really looking forward to Respect Victoria playing a much stronger role in driving the take‑up of the prevention of violence against women and family violence activities within all of the settings where we live and spend our daily lives.

This research that we're here to talk about today speaks to that very issue, I think, of making sure that we deeply embed prevention in all of the places where people live and work, learn and socialise and play, and as you'll hear through the panel discussion and the presentations, preventing violence against women with a disability will be one of the things that will enable that to happen properly, it will be through a focus on disability services system and, in particular, our understanding of the really unique role the disability support workforce can play in addressing the drivers of violence against women with a disability. I think projects like this one that have got a really unique combination of expertise, from practice, from academia and from lived experience at their heart, often have got the most significant impact in identifying new areas for us to explore and offer ways to think about and provide unique solutions to things that we've been grappling with for many, many years in Australia and around the world. I am really excited to see how the fields ‑ both the disability field and the violence against women field ‑ take up and will use this research in the coming months and I will watch and listen today with pleasure. Thank you, all.

JODY BARNEY: Hello, everyone. Thank you, all, and thank you, Emily. We're just waiting to spotlight our interpreter, Paul. Great. Just make sure we can see each other. Terrific. Thanks for that. So what I'd like to just mention now is the importance for us here today to remember ‑ and you may hear a lot of information and also feel quite emotional, so we want to make sure you're looking after yourselves and that you're OK. Respect Victoria, I have to say, has provided this opportunity for the university research to be done in small groups where this work has been unpacked. Disability ‑ the health unit at Melbourne University, I know we're very excited to set this up so that this focus could be done on the work amongst disability and what was needed for women and people with disabilities who experience different social impacts such as family violence and unpacking what is necessary to support our community to overcome their experiences. So the research is really focused on the social, behavioural, environmental and contextual focus on health for people and families who are experiencing violence.

Today you will be hearing from a panel and I would like to introduce to you our Associate Professor Georgina Sutherland. Georgina Sutherland ‑ I'll call her 'GS' for short ‑ is an Associate Professor and Deputy Head of the Disability Health Unit. This is a Centre for Health Equity and it's situated at Melbourne University in the Global Health area. My experience working as an Indigenous woman with the Global Health team a few years ago has been wonderful. A lot of collaboration and people who are focussing on a number of different themes, so it's wonderful to see the work continue. Georgina also has experience with public health research and expertise in evaluating women's health; public law, which is interesting to see, public health law; and also Georgina is currently looking at understanding the complex interplay from a gender equity perspective and people who are experiencing violence, with a particular focus on violence against Women with Disabilities. I'd like to now welcome Georgina Sutherland.

ASSOCIATE PROF. GEORGINA SUTHERLAND: Thank you, Jody, and thank you to Em and the team at Respect Victoria for organising this webinar today so that we can share our work. I'd also like to thank Aunty Georgina for welcoming us to country. I'm joining you today from Melbourne and I would like to acknowledge that I'm on the lands of the Wurundjeri people and to pay my respects to Elders past and present and to any First Nations people who are joining the webinar today. I'm just going to now share my screen. This is the bit where hopefully the tech works. I think that's worked. Our plan today as a research team ‑ so I'm here with Cathy and Jen as well, and one of our project participants. Our plan is to very briefly share some of our findings. We don't have a lot of time but we want to share some key learnings from the project. It had multiple components and we have produced two major reports that are now available on the Respect Victoria website for anyone who wants to dig a bit more deeply into the work we did and into the findings and we've also produced some dissemination materials that are available on the Respect Victoria website also. I'm going to start by outlining our evidence synthesis, which was the first phase of our project, sort of an evidence‑building phase, but before I do, I just want to ground or contextualise our project.

We worked with a really large team of people, so it was a project which lots of people had input into, and I just want to just take a moment to extend our thanks to all the people who contributed along the way to this project. Most particularly, I want to say thank you to the women with disability who worked with us on this project for generously giving us their time, for sharing their stories, their expertise and their passion and their ideas for change, and I make this point particularly now given very recent and powerful commentary about the need to ensure that when we ask women to contribute and to share their perspectives about violence, abuse and discrimination, sometimes painful stories, that we have an obligation to do something with that information, not for reports like these to just sit on the shelves. I think that's one of the key points we would like to share with everyone today.

There was a whole host of people that I'm not going to go into any great detail but I did just want to make mention of Suzette Mitchell, from Respect Victoria, who is not here today but who was really instrumental in this project and provided a lot of expertise and advice for us. I also want to just briefly touch on the policy context because this provides a really important platform for this work to be taken up and taken forward and there's so much stuff happening and a lot of this wasn't even publicly available when we were doing this project. Of course, there's the Disability Royal Commission that really signals violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability as a national issue or a national priority.

We have two recent disability strategies ‑ one at the Commonwealth and one at the state level. We have the Second Action Plan under Free from Violence. Family Safety Victoria has recently released their really important research agenda for the next three years. We all know about the draft National Plan and also of course Changing the landscape, a really important piece of work from Our Watch and Women with Disabilities Victoria, and you'll see the synergies between these two projects as we go through. The evidence synthesis or our sort of evidence‑building phase involved two key components. The first component was an analysis of the most recent Personal Safety Survey. The Personal Safety Survey is administered by the ABS. We used those data to give us the most up‑to‑date population level statistics about the prevalence, nature and dynamics of violence against women with disability in Australia, and as we know violence against women with disability in Australia is unacceptably high, with around 65% of women with disability reporting at least one incident of violence since the age of 15, and we know that rates of violence against young women, particularly against young women with disability and women with cognitive and psychosocial disability, is high. It's important to have these up‑to‑date population level data and we know that we need to invest in better data but that shouldn't be a barrier to action and what I mean by that is that we've known for a very long time that rates of violence are unacceptably high and we need to stop describing the issue but actually act to change the problem.

The second part of our evidence‑building phase was to consider what effective and promising practice looks like by reviewing the international academic literature and community research reports. We found an evidence base that was small, that had a variety of evaluated intervention services and programs. Most of the evaluated strategies sought to change risk factors at the individual level only, the bulk of which were programs to teach women with disability to recognise violence and to enact safety skills for self‑protection against violence. And we don't really wish to discredit these sorts of programs as unimportant, but we know on their own they're unlikely to result in significant and sustained reductions in violence and it also, of course, places the responsibility for violence ‑ it places the responsibility with women with disability and it ignores some of the wider and structural drivers of violence. So our main conclusions really, in a nutshell ‑ our conclusions are violence against women in Australia is unacceptably high; most of the current investment is not primary prevention, it does not target the underlying drivers of violence against women with disability, meaning there is a disconnect between evidence and practice. I think I'm already over time so I'm going to stop sharing my screen now and I'm going to hand back to Jody.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you. Thank you so much, Georgina. It's wonderful to hear what you've had to share with us and what you've had to go through as well. I know it's an important time for us all. So for people who would like more information, please contact Respect Victoria. Have a look on their website and find any more information, more detailed information that you can. Two women that I would like to now introduce to you are very special women who have been involved in a number of opportunities with me to do research throughout coronavirus and a variety of other working projects. Two wonderful women who volunteer their time and have helped with this project. First of all, I'd like to introduce to you Jen Hargrave. I know Jen and have known her for many years, many, many years. We've had wonderful working relationships together and we're like minded on the need to improve in terms of the needs of women with disabilities and accessibility to all levels of community and society. So Jen works with the research team, the community research with the University of Melbourne. I've got a list to describe her but I think in the interests of time, I will now hand over and ask you to introduce yourself, Jen, and then I will also introduce Cathy Vaughan, who will also be speaking to you, who is also an Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne. So both will be talking to you about the project and I think I would like to, in the interests of time ‑ you don't want to hear from me, but let them both present to you all. I know that this will be very interesting. Over to you both. Thank you, Jen and Cathy.

JEN HARGRAVE: Thanks so much, Jody, and thank you for all the work you do in this area yourself. I'll start and then hand over to Cathy. So as we've mentioned, a large component of this project was based around workshops with a co‑design group of Women with Disabilities. The women brought extensive experience to their work as co‑designers. They'd spent many years giving thought to disability rights and gender equality through combinations in their lives of work and study and their personal experiences. The co‑design approach that Cathy brought was ideal for a group of women with such rich knowledge. Cathy's approach is to ask a few thoughtful questions and leave room for co‑designers to explore and to discuss. This was personally refreshing for me. This was an alternative to facilitation being about talking a lot and leaving only a tiny amount of space for co‑designers to think or to talk.

Now I'd like to take a quick step back from this project specifically and to look at things to keep in mind about co‑design in general and I've got four things to think about. The first one is that in our Victorian policy and service systems, we're seeing co‑design become more embedded but while we are embedding it, I'm not sure we're always doing so with purpose. At times, co‑design is actually much more like consultation. Sometimes it does not lead to action and sometimes it doesn't impact the actions that would have happened anyway if we hadn't have done co‑design. The second thing is that co‑design can give us ideas about how to solve problems from the most qualified to solve those problems, those who experienced those problems first‑hand. If we're doing co‑design with people with disabilities with openness and with a willingness to learn, it can challenge our internalised ableism and train us to meet our obligations to the Disability Discrimination Act. Thirdly, some people might not realise how triggering topics like ableism and violence prevention can be. Before running co‑design, do some homework about safety and about disability access. Then ask each co‑designer about their safety and their disability access requirements. Disability access and safety go hand in hand together. And, fourth, if you want to do co‑design, always run it with the resources of budgeting and time so everyone who worked in co‑design on this project was paid for their time, for their professional expertise, at a professional rate. So finally, we're all behind progressing good practice in co‑design and each time we do it, we can learn so much, and if we do it with purpose, we hold the potential to make positive change. That's it from me. Thanks, Jody. I might pass over straight to Cathy.

ASSOCIATE PROF. CATHY VAUGHAN: Thanks, Jen, and thanks, Jody, for the welcome earlier. It's lovely to see you again. I should acknowledge that the workshops that we ran involved Jody and involved Jen bringing their very rich experience to that work, so thank you to you both. I couldn't agree more with what Jen has said about co‑design. The language of co‑design and participatory action research is increasingly used by government and agencies working in a whole range of sectors, but there's not always the investment of time in particular to make that genuine. It takes a lot of time to build trusting relationships with people who've historically been participants in research in a real extractive way, taking their experiences, taking their knowledge, and not jointly producing something new. So I guess a challenge to all of us to hold ourselves and our funders accountable for what actually we mean by "co‑design" and "participatory action approaches".

With this project, we held a series of four workshops and because they happened right in the middle of the COVID restrictions in Victoria, we did them all over Zoom, so that presents real opportunities and challenges. So there are lots of opportunities for participation of people in regional Victoria, which we saw in this project, people who find physically getting into face‑to‑face workshops difficult because of the inaccessible world that we live in and because of fatigue, but fatigue is a very real thing, as I'm sure you all know, on Zoom, and so when designing anything where you're facilitating over a long period of time on Zoom, thinking about the requirements of people for breaks and to manage fatigue or chronic pain is really important. The four workshops we had were initially exploratory to try and draw on this group of women who, between them, had hundreds, literally hundreds, of years of experience of advocacy, of working to create a world where there's reduction in violence against women and that women with disabilities can realise their rights to safety; to try and explore people's knowledge of what violence against women with disability and family violence in the context of disability looks like.

The second workshop then really went on to shift to look at women's priorities. The third workshop was around reaching consensus on how we wanted to present ‑ or how the women wanted to present those priorities to policy makers and people in the sector. And then the fourth workshop that we had was a joint process with key policy and practice stakeholders, an opportunity for policy makers to listen and engage and to discuss with women with disability about what was going to be most feasible to take forward. As Georgina mentioned, there were three main priorities that came through around disability service settings, disability support workers and education settings, and a real call for action in trying to develop primary prevention initiatives in those settings. But in the interests of time, I'm going to stop there because we have a short video from one of our fantastic participants who couldn't be here today on the call but has made a fabulous video explaining the priorities that the group came up with.

Karleen, who was one of our highly experienced and fantastic participants, has research experience from working with Deakin and the University of Sydney and has worked as a researcher, co‑facilitating interviews, doing research design and analysis. She was a founding member of Women with Disabilities Victoria and has been advocating for Women with Disabilities freedom from violence for decades. She lives 300 kilometres from Melbourne and so Karleen is a great example of where Zoom was a great opportunity to increase access and participation for people who might have otherwise found it difficult to come to a physical location. So it's been a real opportunity for Karleen to increase being part of research projects because of the technology that makes that available. So I'm going to stop there. Enough from me, and I'm going to hand over to the video with Karleen.

(Video plays with captions).

ASSOCIATE PROF. GEORGINA SUTHERLAND: Hi, everyone. I think it's back to me again now. Thanks to Jen and Cathy and to the project participants. It's actually reminded me how much the project was an exercise in mutual learning. Well, actually I should say I learnt a lot through the process from the project participants and from the extraordinary skills that Jen and Cathy brought to the co‑design approach. I'm going to share my screen again with everyone. We heard a really strong message through the project about the potential role that the disability support workforce can play in supporting or in enabling safe, respectful inclusive service provision that empowers women, that challenges negative stereotypes, fosters social inclusion and supports decision making and independence. Changing the landscape and our project were happening in parallel and Changing the landscape was publicly launched a couple of months ago and when I looked through it, I could see how well they were aligned, because you can see the disability workforce across these essential actions and the way that they might be involved in essential actions to prevent violence in terms of challenging the normalisation and acceptance of violence, improving attitudes, promoting inclusion, independence, agency and participation. And that's not to say that that's easy or without its challenges, and that's what the next component of our project did.

We did a policy scan and stakeholder interviews. They were designed, and we did that to help us ask these particular questions about what are some of the challenges. I'm sorry, that's quite a lot of text in there, but our key questions really were around what were the key policy and legal and regulatory frameworks for disability support workers in Victoria, how do those frameworks intersect with family violence policy and practices, what are the opportunities within the disability support workforce within those regulatory environments to embed primary prevention initiatives, and then what is the capacity of that workforce to support primary prevention. I'm going to start with our policy scan. I was a bit amused that this was a really large piece of work that I've reduced literally to three dot points in the interests of time, but the three key points I'm going to mention here are that while many of the frameworks do recognise and acknowledge the risk of family violence for people with disability, the gendered nature of violence and the heightened risk for women and girls with disability is rarely acknowledged. There are a lot of regulatory, safeguarding frameworks that sit within the NDIS but at the time they really fell far short of addressing the structural drivers and practices, sort of the structural practices in the provision of care that enables violence, and at the time at the state level, the Victorian Disability Abuse Prevention strategy was the only one that had a specific set of actions to address the prevention of violence against women with disability. In terms of the stakeholder consultations or the interviews, those comprised 10 interviews with key informants across the fields of safeguarding, regulation and registration, disability services and violence prevention, and from those interviews we emerged four key themes. The first was the potential for primary prevention in paid support relationships and the way in which quality supports and relationships can facilitate the empowerment of women, their participation in the community, and social inclusion; the nature and conditions of work under the current market model. The stakeholders that we spoke to raised issues around the low status or the under‑valuing of care and support work at a society level but also at an individual level, the conditions of work, including low pay, precarious employment and minimal opportunities for career development, upskilling and its potential to impact on the ability to develop ongoing and positive relationships with clients and with other service workers.

The third thing we called cultures of disrespect, and this included the culture and normalisation of disrespect towards disability support workers, noting here that gender equality, racism and discrimination are intersecting factors for women with disability, often as well as those who are employed to do support work. The final thing was the role of training within the broader system of change. So while there's really broad acknowledgment about the need for training, it was a very strong message that training alone was not going to be effective or sufficient for shifting towards safe, positive and respectful support relationships.

Because I am absolutely sure I'm running out of time, I'm just going to talk about the final part of our project, which was thinking about next steps, some guiding statements about what we might do with this research going forward, and this was one of our key guiding principles really that women and girls with disability play a central role in building evidence, and that while participatory and co‑produced approaches like we used in our research are important, there's also a need to invest in leadership, in careers of women with disability in research and policy. Sorry, again this is really full and we won't have time to go through it. It's in the reports. This is a series of guiding statements for progressing the work that we organised around the socio‑ecological model. Those working in violence prevention will be very familiar with that and it really builds on evidence about the need for mutually enforcing strategies to bring about really important social change. I'll leave that there again. I'll stop sharing my screen and I will again hand back to Jody. Thanks, everyone.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you so much, Georgina. Thank you, Jen and Cathy. It's been terrific. It's wonderful. Wonderful the work you're doing and also from Karleen too. I think it's really important, all the information that has been shared, and these slides will be made available and you can contact the organisers of today and they will, I'm sure, be very happy to send it out to you. I know we do have some time in our agenda for questions but with time running short, we will need to hold off on those questions until the end of our session today. So some of the answers to the questions you're typing in the Q&A section, you'll see some answers and thank you to people who are answering those questions while we're running the session today. I think it's really important that we have an introduction of our panel today. I have to say that we have some stars amongst us who are just amazing. On our panel, we have Commissioner Dan Stubbs, we have the CEO of Women with Disabilities Victoria, Nadia Mattiazzo and we also have senior policy adviser with Women with Disabilities at Our Watch, Melissa O'Reilly. I would like to thank you, panellists, for joining us today. I will just briefly introduce you ‑ I would but I think the information and your knowledge and experience that you're going to share with us today is much more important than going through your bios. I think you have very extensive bios that we can share with people today for those who would like to read through them at a later stage. But to start our conversation with our panel, just to remind you there are five minutes per panel member and we will be a little strict with time. I'm sure that you're the same as me. Everybody's very excited and wanting to chat and have a yarn, just like I do, but without any further ado, I would like to make sure that our panel have the opportunity to speak and some time for questions at the end. So first of all, I'd like to hand over the floor to our Commissioner, Dan Stubbs.

COMMISSIONER DAN STUBBS: Thanks so much, Jody, and thank you to all the organisers for allowing me to be part of this on a stage with really a bunch of pretty impressive women, women who I hold in extremely high regard and on a topic that I'm quite passionate about. As a man with disability, I recognise my privilege in this virtual room as a white man and I just want to make the acknowledgment that men are the problem and there's a lot of work to do by men in this space. The Victorian Disability Worker Commission regulates all disability workers right across Victoria, no matter how they're funded, whether it be NDIS funding or other funding. There's around 100,000 disability workers in Victoria who we regulate. We do that by taking complaints. We take those complaints from anybody. We receive notifications from other workers or from organisations who employ them. Those notifications are about conduct that put people with disability at risk of harm.

We also have a voluntary registration scheme, which we manage with the Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria, which is chaired by Melanie Eagle, who is a former Chair of Respect Victoria, and that Board promotes ‑ that Board deals with registration of disability workers and has those registered disability workers meet certain standards of quality and training to promote quality in the disability services sector. I'm really pleased to welcome this report, the report No More Excuses. It shows that violence against women with disability takes many forms ‑ from actual violence and power and control ‑ and disability workers can be the perpetrators of that violence, a very small minority but they can be; they can be perpetrators of family violence, and they can allow the perpetration of family violence by really not doing anything about it. But that is a minority of workers. I think we need to make that clear.

Now, I just have a slight technical hitch. I'm really sorry. And in many ways, that's the Commission's role, to do something about that and respond to issues when disability workers are part of that. But that's a response only. Really a lot of what this report is importantly about is primary prevention, and there's some key protective factors which workers could be part of, and I know there's so many really high‑quality disability workers out there who can be part of this. Participation in society is a key part of making sure that people are OK.

Women with disabilities who are isolated and not participating, not included in society, do not have relationships or friendships or acquaintances outside of the workers who assist them, are more at risk, or if they only have one relationship and otherwise not participating, that's a massive risk factor, and so we see good workers strengthening and assisting women with disabilities to be part of society in whatever way that looks for women with disabilities, and that can involve a whole range of things, whether it be education or work or participating in society in so many ways. For some people, it might mean joining a club or church or a whole range of things. I also think that great disability workers can assist to reduce the poor perceptions of women with disabilities and their agency. The Family Violence Royal Commission noted that women with disabilities are often seen as incompetent and inherently vulnerable, and these things create massive barriers to reporting or confronting family violence, as I am sure you would be aware, and often women with disabilities are seen as not being credible witnesses in their own matters. It also sees a certain tolerance of violence against women with disabilities. That's a reluctance to recognise violence against women with disabilities and believe the abuse occurred. All this was backed up by the Changing the landscape research, which I commend as another great report. The No More Excuses report recognises the worker role in primary prevention and it calls on us, the Disability Worker Commission and the Disability Worker Registration Board, to look at things like training and continuing professional development for workers to assist workers to understand violence and all of its complexities, including the power and control elements.

I recognise that the Commission and the Board have a role in promoting the training that does this, to lift the status of workers in this space, to promote respect for the workers and women with disabilities so we have empowered workers who can call out behaviour, report violence and support women to report. I think one of the things that we heard before about the disrespect of workers and the disrespect of women with disability in our society I think aren't unrelated and I think all of us have a role, including the Commission and the Registration Board ‑ have a role in really working on how workers are respected and understood as professionals providing assistance. I commend this excellent report to all of you. I look forward to taking it back to the Commission and the Registration Board to look at our role in helping to take future steps in it. I really also just want to acknowledge the extraordinary leadership that we are lucky to have in Victoria for women with disabilities ‑ obviously, Women with Disabilities Victoria, the organisation, who I hold enormous respect for, but all the other women with disabilities who participated in this, I'm extremely grateful for. Thank you, everybody, and thanks, Jody.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you very much, Commissioner Dan. It's always wonderful to hear from you and I do know that it's an important conversation, and we will hold off on our questions and answering those questions until later. I will now hand over to our next presenter, who has about five minutes to get through all of her information and I'm sure it will be fabulous. I would now like to introduce to you Nadia. Over to you.

NADIA MATTIAZZO: Thanks, Jody. And I will try really hard to keep it to five minutes. Thank you, Commissioner Stubbs. If I was really, really smart, I'd say "what he said", but in the interests of having some say, I'm going to talk a little bit about women with disabilities and what I see as I guess the three key features that I think about and that we think about in terms of in this space. So firstly, for those who don't know, Women with Disabilities Victoria is the peak body of women with disabilities in Victoria. Our vision is a world where all women are respected and can fully experience life. We see our role as providing systemic support, advocacy and resources to women with disabilities in leadership roles. We see our role as working with community services and organisations to ensure they are inclusive of women with disabilities. We work to ensure that services for people with disabilities consider gender perspectives that are responsive to women with disabilities. We work in partnerships with other disability and women's organisations. We encourage and undertake research such as this, into issues affecting women with disabilities, and we provide a voice for women with disabilities to influence government policy and legislation.

My three quick points in the interests of time: I cannot reiterate the importance of primary prevention and how work in this space can reduce the demand on the response sector. We need to understand who our perpetrators are, why they perpetrate and why it's not this that's looked at, as opposed to why women experience violence. It's talking about what are the actual barriers or what are the actual influences of violence. It's important for respectful relationships to be discussed in school settings. It is important for boys and girls within these school settings who have disabilities to access these types of programs, programmatic access we call it, so that they understand what being respectful is and they understand about respectful relationships. Also, if programs like the ones I'm talking about are open to parents, they should also be accessible to parents with disabilities as well, and also I guess where support workers come into play. Maybe it's important for support workers to be also able to access these programs to support the people that they're working with.

Co‑design ‑ and we've talked about co‑design, it's been talked about a lot today ‑ but co‑design approach to this kind of work is really, really important. We heard from Karleen in terms of the knowledge that she brings and brought to this research. It's invaluable and it's the direct experience of women with disabilities which makes for good framework, makes for good practice, as well. To borrow a well‑known phrase from another sector, nothing about us without us. Again, the lived experience perspective is absolutely vital to the success of any work in the prevention space, and finally, I kind of thought of a way to explain what I see as the key influences or the key components of the prevention space, and I kind of look at the social model of disability, which I hope we all will know about. It's about barriers that society faces in the way of people with disabilities. So I'm kind of looking at this work as the barriers that society faces in the face of women with disabilities in terms of their experience of violence as a risk factor for them. I cannot reiterate how much this report will play a role in I guess community understanding of the issues that women experience and I guess the need for supporting and establishing frameworks and supports for cohorts like disability workers to be able to play a really key role in this space. I'm going to stop now because I can talk about this for weeks, months, years, but Jody will be very unhappy. So thank you, all, for allowing me to speak and back to you, Jody.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you so much, Nadia. I'm always happy to hear what you have to say. Thank you so much for the information you've shared. I think it's really important for us women with disabilities to have a voice at the table. Now I'd like to hand over to Melissa. Five minutes, Melissa, just a reminder. Thank you so much.

MELISSA O'REILLY: Thank you, Jody. Hi, everyone. I'm Melissa O'Reilly. I'm coming to you today from the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and I would like to pay my respects to their Elders past and present and extend those respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are here today. I would also like to acknowledge the disability and women's rights activists, especially women with lived experience whose activism over the decades has set the foundation for this work that we're doing today. In particular, I'd like to specifically acknowledge the late, great Sue Salthouse and her significant contributions to the development of the Our Watch and WDV [Women with Disabilities Victoria] resource Changing the landscape.

So I work at Our Watch, which is the national organisation to prevent violence against women and their children, and in 2019 Our Watch and WDV formed a partnership to build evidence about how to stop violence against women and girls with disabilities before it starts. The output of this partnership is the piece of work launched last month, that Georgina referred to, called Changing the landscape. This is a national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities. We created this resource with the strategic guidance of an expert project advisory group and it was also informed by national stakeholder consultations. So I'm really grateful to have been invited here today to talk about the relationship between the work of the University of Melbourne and Changing the landscape. We know that the only way to stop violence against women and girls with disabilities from happening in the first place is to take a primary prevention approach that identifies what drives this violence and what actions we must take as a society to address those drivers. So this is what Changing the landscape does. It shows how gender inequality and ableism and in some cases other forms of oppression such as racism and homophobia and trans phobia can intersect and compound to drive these high rates of violence against women and girls with disabilities. Changing the landscape tells us to prevent this violence we need to address gender equality and ableism at all levels of society. This means, for instance, challenging ableist and sexist stereotypes, promoting the social inclusion of women with disabilities, and increasing women with disabilities' independence and control over decision making. So we see this work by the University of Melbourne and Changing the landscape as being mutually reinforcing and complementary pieces of work. While Changing the landscape sets out the essential prevention actions that are needed across a really broad range of settings, the University of Melbourne has delved deeply into some of the specific settings for prevention action, and it was really great to see that these settings were prioritised by women with lived experience of disability. Changing the landscape makes clear that to prevent this violence, we need action at all levels of society. And that requires multiple, long‑term, mutually reinforcing strategies. And likewise, this work by the University of Melbourne confirms the need for action at multiple levels of society. In their consideration of the disability support workforce as a site for prevention action, they've identified that we must go beyond a sole focus on workforce training to look at the changes needed to systems and structures, organisational cultures and practices, also with consideration to the factors that might act as enablers or barriers to action, such as the structural and gender inequalities that we see in the disability support workforce.

Violence against women and girls with disabilities is preventable and action to prevent this violence is urgently needed. This work by the University of Melbourne is a significant step towards the development of prevention interventions that will address the drivers of violence and help to stop this violence before it starts. So in closing, I would like to thank Respect Victoria and the University of Melbourne for having me here today and I'd like to congratulate the University of Melbourne and the women who participated in this research project on this very important piece of work. Thank you.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you so much, all three of you, for such wonderful presentations. A lot of food for thought, a lot of information has been shared and I think that I agree we need to have that continual conversation to ensure that all people have information and have the best access to the appropriate support in order to prevent violence against women and girls. I would like to also thank you for sticking to the time! I know that's really difficult to do, so thank you, all. I'm a very happy facilitator. So now what we have is some time. We have some time for some questions to the researchers and the presenters. So if I could just ask the presenters and the researchers to join us on screen ‑ Jen, Cathy, Georgina. Great. Thank you. So we have some questions that have been posed. I know some have been answered in the chat, in the Q&A section, which is wonderful, but I would like to ask a question from Christine, Christine Jennings, who I've known for many years. Hello, Christine. So I'll just summarise the question: with the difficulty with training and professional development for the disability support workforce, which often impacts workforce needs, there's very little opportunity for team meetings and professional supervision where violence prevention could be unpacked and supported. What do you think would be important initiatives for organisations and services who look after people with disability support workers to ensure that their staff can have the appropriate training to try and prevent violence from happening and make sure that their clients can feel safe? Georgina, would you like to answer that?

ASSOCIATE PROF. GEORGINA SUTHERLAND: Thanks, Jody, for starting with the easy question! I'll have a go, though. And in many ways actually the question reflects what stakeholders did tell us during the consultation process ‑ you know, that disability support workers are often working on their own, sometimes with no supervision, no organising body, little connections with each other as well. So we did hear this as being one of the key challenges, not only around training because, of course, that's not the only thing we were talking about with the stakeholders in the consultations, but we certainly raised when we talked about training the difficulties of how you embed training in a workforce that is removed from organisational oversight and governance. So that question is very much reflective of what we heard of the challenges. In terms of what ‑ I think the second part of the question there, Jody, was about what organisations might be able to do, and I guess part of the key learnings from this project that we want to disseminate out is really connecting up the evidence on the drivers of violence against women with disability with practice. So often when we talk about this ‑ and certainly our Evidence Review revealed this, that there isn't a lot that is actually primary prevention in this space, so that tends to be more around early intervention and response, even though that absolutely needs work and needs investment alongside primary prevention. But I think what we would like to really reiterate here is the importance of thinking about what drives violence, so really looking upstream around what relationships look like, what paid support relationships look like, and the ways they might be able to impact on primary prevention. I'm going to just check with Jen ‑ sorry to put you on the spot, Jen ‑ whether there was something else you wanted to add there?

JEN HARGRAVE: That's well said, Georgina. In prevention of violence against women, we talk about changing attitudes and we know that training is one way to do that, but training isn't going to change the structures that allowed violence to flourish.

JODY BARNEY: I would tend to agree. I think that there's more happening in this space, not only the attitudes but also what the structures and the impacts of those structures are, and make sure that we are party to ensure that the right access to information and knowing what the processes are are important for women themselves who have disabilities. Cathy, did you have something that you would like to add to that?

ASSOCIATE PROF. CATHY VAUGHAN: I agree with what Georgina and Jen have said. I think it's also about violence ‑ making a more inclusive workforce so that part of changing attitudes around disability and addressing ableism is ensuring that we have people with disability employed in all kinds of sectors, including in the violence response services, including in the violence prevention programming. I think that also would go a way to changing attitudes. And I just notice in the chat, there's a question about the role of local councils and how they can address or support the priority areas, and partly that can be around employment and recruitment practices, but it also could be about supporting training for ‑ there was another question about the unpaid workforce, supporting training for the unpaid workforce in local government areas. I think that would be a really valuable role for council but I'm jumping ahead. I think they kind of link together.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you so much. I would like to ask Commissioner Dan Stubbs, with your work in the disability workforce space and what you've noticed with the regulations, what do you think in terms of how this could be embedded? What do you think needs to happen?

COMMISSIONER DAN STUBBS: Thanks, Jody. This area of questioning really gets to one of the ‑ I guess the roots of the challenge for us all in this space because for some this will be a resourcing problem about how we support workers and there's different types of workers and different types of work going on. Most of us know that the array of types of disabilities that exist and the array of types of work and workers that exist out there, there are some workers who work together in small groups, in share houses, and that kind of debriefing and mutual support to make sure people are supported and developed and trained and that kind of thing, it can be made possible, although it's a resourcing issue, but then we've got a whole lot of workers out there who so often are working alone, going into people's houses, and my struggle there is to confront: how do we support those workers who have the opportunity to either support someone to take a step to do something or call something out themselves? That's a big ask of someone who is very poorly paid and often alone and may not have the experience to do this. I would question any of us to be able to do that on our own. So that kind of a question I'm really uncertain about and the structures we need to create around those people that are going into different places, including people's homes on their own, for me that's a key one, which is a bit different to the one where we've got people working with other workers and with other people with disabilities and more closely kind of managed or supervised and supported. There's work that needs to happen there but it's different work and like a lot of things in the disability sector, it's partly about attitude and it's partly about resourcing, and we need a fair bit of change in both, I'd say, I'm afraid.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you, Commissioner. I think that there's a lot more work that we need to unpack in terms of support workers and people who are working with women with disabilities, not just in a voluntary capacity or in the paid workforce, but we're looking at a variety of levels, a variety of settings. One last question for now because we're coming to the end of our session today. The question is to researchers: what are some ways that PVAW [prevention of violence against women] workers can perhaps adopt and take on this research and embed it in their work?

ASSOCIATE PROF. GEORGINA SUTHERLAND: A really great question and I just want to just slightly loop back to the conversation just following on from Dan and the conversation on the disability support workforce and to say this was a relatively short project on a reasonably small budget ‑ in fact, a very small budget ‑ but we were identifying priority settings for action in primary prevention where we worked with women with disabilities and then we did some small pieces of work to look at what we might do within that setting, and, of course, there were other settings as well, like education and disability service provision that we learnt from women with disability were important for action as well, that we didn't have any time to pursue and we would really like to.

But in answering the question, just from the very start of the work and I think there's a lot more that we can do, particularly in research and in the practice settings that can move this forward. Back to the question at hand, though, which is how PVAW workers can take up this work, I'm going to repeat my answer from the last question a little bit, which is to think about how the drivers connect with practice, and I think that's what the work really contributes in terms of the way people can embed this research into their work, and I'm going to hand over to Cathy because she's always got something better to say than I did.

ASSOCIATE PROF. CATHY VAUGHAN: That's not true, Georgina. Well, I think there's a lot of opportunities out there for PVAW workers and PVAW initiatives to think about how they're inclusive of the disability sector. So there's often real gaps between the disability sector writ large, which is services, service workers, and people with disability, and the violence prevention world, and even the language we use to talk about often the same thing or very similar things is quite different, and so thinking about how if you're developing a PVAW initiative, that that could be inclusive of the disability sector in your area or that you might actually specifically work with that sector to develop a dedicated project. I think that would be a really great opportunity for PVAW workers. Jen and Jody I am sure would have something to say on this too. Jen, do you want to start off?

JEN HARGRAVE: Yes, just building on the layers of what you're saying, I think also be thinking about programmatic access, so when you're rolling out a violence prevention activity, be looking at how it is accessible and inclusive for people with disability, so even if it's a government ad campaign or a government consultation, or if it's a community‑based event or program, what's happening to make sure that people with disabilities have access to it? Are people with disabilities' experiences of your program being reflected in the evaluation, and are they being reflected in the budget so people with disabilities might have costs to participate in your program and are you going to support them to cover those costs so they can have equity of access? Jody?

JODY BARNEY: Well, I totally agree with all comments. I can't think of anything I would like to add. It's clearly stated ‑ access to not just access but access to language, to spoken language interpreters, to sign language interpreters, to print, whatever is required, and making sure that that space is culturally safe for all participants. And I am very sorry that we have come to the time where I need to wrap up. Time has gone so quickly today. I've been engrossed all morning. Thank you, all ‑ our panel, our researchers, thank you for your expertise and knowledge. It's been a brilliant session this morning for me and I'm still learning, regardless. This work I have been involved in for 35 years but I'm still learning so I think it's really important for all of us to remind ourselves to go softly, go gently with ourselves and the community and at the same time be pushing the agenda. Before I close, I would like to invite Cecilia Hemana from ‑ where are you? Can I see you? There you are. And Cecilia is going to wrap up and be our final presenter today. Over to you.

CECILIA HEMANA: Thank you, Jody, and thank you for your expert facilitation today. I know we are just at our 11.30 so I'll be very quick and thank everyone for indulging us for an additional few minutes. I do want to also thank our two fantastic Auslan interpreters, Julie Judd and Paul Heuston as well and to thank Georgina Nicholson for her generous Welcome to Country, and for myself to also acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands from which we are all dialling in from, and for me that is the Wurundjeri people, and pay my respects to Elders past and present. I really want to thank our university partners, Melbourne University with Jen, Cathy and with Georgina. This research is a culmination of 18 months of hard work and the quality of that research I think really reflects that not only their hard work but also the process that they undertook, which was critically important, that they undertook meaningful, purposeful and strategic co‑design with women with disability. This intentional participatory design places the power back into the hands of those affected by research, policies and programs, which is a necessary step to breaking down the dynamics of power, privilege and discrimination which continue to drive violence against women with disability. So thank you, Melbourne Uni. I'd also really like to thank Karleen as well for your candid reflections on the research project and to thank all project participants who were critical and central to this research. A big thank you to our panellists, to Commissioner Dan Stubbs, to Nadia Mattiazzo ‑ sorry, Nadia, I think that's my accent again, your surname, my apologies for mispronouncing that ‑ and to you, Melissa O'Reilly, to all three of you for your leadership and advocacy for women with disability and for generously sharing your wealth of expertise with us today. Thank you. Finally, to Respect Victoria's staff, to Anne Stephens, who first started this project 18 months ago, to Dr Suzette Mitchell, who took carriage of this project and saw it through to its conclusion, and to our research and communication teams who I know are online. A massive thank you to you for pulling this event together behind the scenes and delivering it with the support of Happenings Australia. As all of you would know, running one of these events takes a lot of effort, coordination, and very tight deadlines, so thank you. The discussions today have emphasised how important it is that we and others continue to build the evidence base for the prevention of violence against women with disability. It's also really critical that we don't reinvent the wheel, so for those of you who are commissioning, who are funding research, please use the great research that's already been produced not only by this piece of work but also the amazing work by Our Watch, Changing the landscape, but also the other pieces of work that are out there. The research dollar is very tight and so we ask that you leverage what's there and build on that evidence base rather than reinvent. I think our focus should be on primary research that's meaningful and that fills those knowledge gaps so that we really can try and stop violence before it starts. Finally, today's conversation has really reaffirmed for me the importance of flipping the script when we talk about violence prevention, moving our focus away from not only focussing on what women can do to protect themselves, which is, of course, an important element, but instead flipping that script and focussing also on the perpetrators of violence and the culture that allows this violence to occur in the first place. Taking a community, societal and a whole‑of‑system lens to this issue is the only way that we can truly stop this violence before it starts.

And, finally, if after hearing today's research anyone requires support or help, there are some support numbers on our screen and so for immediate help, please dial triple 0 and for other support, you can contact Safe Steps support services number, which is a specialist disability service, which is 1800 015 188. Again, I just want to thank everyone for attending today. We're delighted to see that so many people were able to join us. To all our panellists, our speakers, and also just a little plug to take some time to complete a five‑minute survey for us just so that ‑ your feedback is so important so that we can make sure these forums are going to be helpful to you and of value. I'll hand over to you, Jody. Thank you.

JODY BARNEY: Thank you very much, Cecilia. I would also like to thank just quickly Respect Victoria for the amazing work they've been doing and also to Melbourne University, the Disability Unit, and their help with unpacking the research and all the participants involved in the research. I also hope that you all have the opportunity to complete the survey, which is really vital for us in this sector, so that we know what you value and what you've learnt. I'd like to thank all participants who have been watching today and also those in the background, the people who have been helping me to understand how to navigate the Zoom with the cameras on and cameras off. I've been very appreciative, and thank you for allowing me to facilitate today. I'd also like to thank our interpreters. Without them, I would not have had access. So thank you, all. Look after yourselves and have a good rest of the day. Thanks again.